



Developing a Sustainable Gastronomic Destination

Through Chefs' Sustainable Practices in Scanian
Restaurants, Sweden

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Abstract

The thesis investigates how restaurant professionals in Scania, Sweden, integrate sustainability into their daily routines and communicate these efforts to guests to shape gastronomic tourism in the region. The study examines how everyday culinary operations influence local perceptions and attract tourists to Scania's unique foodscape. Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative approach, drawing data from semi-structured interviews with professionals across eight selected restaurants within Scania. Using Social Practice Theory (SPT) as an analytical framework, the empirical findings are categorized through the interconnected dimensions of materials, competencies, and meanings. The analysis reveals that sustainability is not a set of isolated individual choices, but a collection of socially embedded practices woven into everyday kitchen work. Material elements— including local and seasonal products, kitchen equipment, and supplier networks— dictate operational limits while strengthening the local economy through the procurement of goods and services from regional producers and suppliers. Competencies such as culinary skills, adaptive creativity, and specialized knowledge translate sustainability goals into physical realities. Meanwhile, the dimension of meaning links these routines to deeper cultural values, including authenticity, regional pride, and destination identity. The study demonstrates that restaurateurs act as vital agents in sustainable gastronomic tourism by actively shaping guest experiences, consumption habits, and perceptions of local food culture. However, these practices are constantly challenged by operational realities, such as seasonal and climatic barriers, economic pressures, and fragmented supply chain infrastructures. Ultimately, this thesis provides a dual contribution. First, it offers practical insights by demonstrating that sustainable gastronomic tourism is an ongoing, socially organized practice that must be embedded directly into the organizational structure of restaurants. Second, it extends the theoretical reach of Social Practice Theory within the hospitality literature by illustrating how sustainability is enacted through the interconnected dimensions of materials, competencies, and meanings.

Keywords: Gastronomic tourism, hospitality, restaurant practices, Scania, Social Practice Theory, Sustainability, Sweden

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GRA	Green Restaurant Association
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SLU	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
SPT	Social Practice Theory
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

1. Introduction

This chapter provides the background and rationale for the study. It examines the interconnections among restaurants, sustainability, gastronomy, and gastronomic tourism, emphasizing the role of restaurant professionals and sustainable practices. The chapter then presents the problem statement, outlines the study's purpose and research objectives, and concludes with an overview of the thesis structure.

1.1 Background of the study

The restaurant industry acts as a key sector linking people to food and the surrounding landscape (Chakraborty, 2018). As hospitality-related businesses, restaurants contribute to economic growth in all regions, supporting both domestic and international tourism (Elkhwesky et al., 2023; Mashika et al., 2021; Sparks et al., 2003). Sustainability has become a central concern globally, influencing social, economic, and environmental agendas. Sustainability marketing is now a significant strategy for communicating responsible practices, shaping consumer behavior, and facilitating sustainable tourism and business development (Nkamnebe, 2011). The global trend towards sustainable restaurants depends on the collaboration among restaurant owners, guests' willingness to select sustainable dining options, and the adoption of sustainable menus (Jacobs and Klosse, 2016). Sustainable restaurants can contribute to all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Higgins-Desbiolles and Wijesinghe, 2019), but are most closely aligned with SDG 12 'Responsible consumption and production' (Jones et al., 2025; United Nations, 2025). For clarity, the term 'restaurant' in this study broadly encompasses all ready-to-eat food environments (Weijers et al., 2025), including cafés, cafeterias, bistros, and similar food service settings where meals are prepared and consumed on-site.

The tourism industry is a major global economic sector (Lew, 2011; Sofronov, 2017; Pjanić, 2019) and has considerable potential to influence sustainable behaviors, particularly through restaurants that shape consumption patterns. (Weijers et al., 2025; Hjolger, 2004). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) reports a gap between travelers' interest in sustainability and their actual behavior, with cost and quality remaining the primary decision factors. Sustainability is a priority for only a small minority, and limited exposure to sustainable options leads travelers to expect affordability and explicit communication from businesses (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2024). In Sweden, tourism's economic impact increased in 2025 compared to the previous year. As noted by Maria Wilberg, "Domestic tourists make up the largest part of total tourism consumption, but foreign tourists contributed more to the increase" (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, n.d.). Sustainable

gastronomic tourism is therefore positioned as a model for preserving the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural integrity of destinations by promoting short food supply chains (Paolo and Fontefrancesco, 2019). Additionally, the SusgastroIdentity and GastroRegDevelop scales have been proposed to measure key indicators such as food authenticity, local sourcing, and community impact (Paunić et al., 2024).

Gastronomy is a multifaceted concept that resists precise definition. Scholars have described gastronomy as the art or science of food and refined eating, emphasizing the requisite skills and knowledge, consistent with the term's origins (Santich, 2004; Hegarty and O'Mahony, 2001). More broadly, gastronomy encompasses the foods and beverages produced, consumed, and experienced within specific cultural or regional contexts (Santich, 2004), particularly in relation to tourism and local culinary identity. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations offers the following definition of sustainable gastronomy.

Sustainable gastronomy, therefore, means cuisine that takes into account where the ingredients are from, how the food is grown, and how it gets to our markets and eventually to our plates (FAO, 2025).

Gastronomy significantly influences how destinations are presented to visitors, functioning both as a central attraction and as an element that enhances the overall travel experience (Eren, 2016; Hall and Mitchell, 2006). It is a vital component of tourism, as tourists often seek to experience local cuisine within a specific landscape, and gastronomy has been effectively incorporated into destination branding (Sormaz et al., 2016). Richards (2014) argues that while tangible heritage- such as physical artifacts, structures, and spaces- initially attracts tourists, intangible heritage, including knowledge, skills, and expressions, provides destinations with unique identities and authentic cultural experiences. Consequently, the brand image of a destination is crucial in travel decisions (Dahiya and Batra, 2016), as local food traditions, customs, and cultural practices differentiate destinations and contribute to memorable tourism experiences (Richards, 2014). Enthusiastic food lovers, or 'foodies', are particularly likely to choose travel destinations based on culinary experiences (Getz and Robinson, 2014).

Scania, located in the southern part of Sweden, is recognized as one of the country's most important agricultural regions due to its fertile soils, favorable climate, and flat terrain (Visit Sweden, n.d.). The region encompasses approximately 437,066 hectares of agricultural land (Land use in Sweden, 2020) and is home to about 7,500 farms (Swedish Board of Agriculture, 2025). As a result, Scania is often referred to as Sweden's 'Bread Basket' (*kornbod* in Swedish) in Sweden (Olsson, 2015). The region exhibits significant crop diversity, producing grains such as rye, barley, and oats (Skoglund, 2022), as well

as vegetables like potatoes, sugar beets, oilseeds, and legumes (Olsson, 2015), which facilitate local sourcing in the restaurant sector. Statistics Sweden (2025) reports that Scania has the largest areas of winter rye and winter barley (Areas sown in autumn, 2025). A case study by the University of Gothenburg identifies Scania as a ‘thick and diversified’ regional innovation system for environmentally friendly food production, with approximately 350 food industry-related companies (Martin and Martin, 2021). This context provides restaurant professionals with substantial opportunities to source local and regional produce, reducing reliance on imports. Consequently, Scania offers a robust foundation for the regional food scene and supports the advancement of sustainable gastronomy.

Scania features a distinctive foodscape characterized by high-quality local produce (Visit Sweden, 2023). The region attracts both international and domestic tourists owing to its strategic geographic location and accessibility. Scania is directly connected to Copenhagen via the Øresund Bridge, facilitating access from Denmark and continental Europe (Visit Sweden, n.d.). Additional transportation options, including ferry connections with neighboring countries, an extensive rail and road network, and proximity to international airports, position Scania as a key gateway for tourism in Southern Sweden.

Balancing economic objectives with sustainability goals continues to be a major challenge for restaurants (Warwick, 2015; Parsakia, 2023). Regardless of size, the restaurant sector operates within a profit-driven framework, as a commercial food service industry (Zucchini, 2025). Simultaneously, sustainability initiatives require investments in skills and knowledge (Lacy et al., 2009), often creating tensions between profitability and social responsibility.

Despite these challenges, restaurants hold significant responsibilities across the three pillars of sustainability (Maynard et al., 2020; Maia et al., 2024; Madanaguli et al., 2022). Socially, sustainable restaurants serve as key intermediaries in local food systems by sourcing from local producers, farmers, and fishers, thereby supporting livelihoods and strengthening local economies (Feenstra, 1997). Through fostering local supply chains, restaurants contribute to circular economies (Rahmawati and Novani, 2024). They also generate employment opportunities, particularly for the younger generation, while advancing sustainability objectives (Getselova, 2024). Additionally, restaurants influence responsible consumption by shaping food choices, portion sizes, and awareness of sustainability practices among guests (Lau et al., 2025; Jose et al., 2026).

From an environmental perspective, restaurants can mitigate their climate impact by sourcing locally to minimize transportation distances and associated emissions (Roy, 2016), implementing effective waste management strategies, and emphasizing plant-based menus to reduce reliance on resource-intensive meat production (Dwivedi and Shukla, n.d.).

Economically, sustainable practices can generate cost efficiencies (Dwivedi and Shukla, n.d.) by minimizing food waste through effective handling, innovative menu design, and optimized resource utilization. These practices encompass food preparation, appropriate storage, and preservation techniques, enabling restaurants to extend the use of seasonal ingredients and reduce dependence on imported products.

Consumer awareness of sustainability varies; some individuals prioritize sensory attributes, presentation, and flavor, while others, particularly those with higher levels of education, emphasize responsible and ethical eating (Mancini et al., 2017). As a result, restaurants have the opportunity to move beyond traditional business models by integrating sustainability and fostering long-term value creation.

The knowledge and skills of restaurant professionals are critical in creating value within sustainable gastronomy. By integrating sustainability into daily operations, restaurants can create positive and memorable experiences for visitors (Karagiannis and Andrinou, 2021). This approach not only elevates the destination's image but also strengthens tourists' intentions to revisit and recommend the region. Additionally, restaurants help preserve and promote regional culture and traditions by incorporating seasonal local ingredients, traditional recipes, and storytelling into the dining experience. Thus, gastronomy serves as a medium for visitors to engage with the identity, heritage, and authenticity of a region.

1.2 Problem statement

The problem remains how a sustainable food service environment can be created to add sufficient value to the selection of a gastronomic destination. As practitioners are central to the process, they need to develop a deeper understanding of what needs to be improved and how to address specific areas in the tourism industry. Gastronomic tourism in Scania remains relatively under-explored and underrepresented in both academic literature and tourism promotion; however, the region possesses considerable untapped potential due to its strong agricultural base, local food traditions, and emerging focus on sustainability and regional identity (Gössling and Hall, 2016).

1.3 Purpose of the study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the role of sustainability among restaurant professionals in the development of regional gastronomy in Scania. Additionally, the study contributes practical insights that restaurants may utilize to

advance industry development and suggests directions for future research. Specifically, the study addresses five objectives, outlined below.

1. To examine how restaurant professionals understand and define sustainability in their daily operations.
2. To identify concrete sustainable practices used in sourcing, cooking, and serving food.
3. To explore the waste management strategies and resource utilization during kitchen operations.
4. To identify the challenges and limitations restaurants face in implementing sustainable practices.

1.4 Structure of thesis/ Overview

Chapter two presents a literature review, introducing current research on relevant case studies, key findings and their strengths and limitations, and how this study addresses existing gaps through the lens of Social Practice Theory. The subsequent chapter details the research methodology, including the selected methods, research design, and materials. Chapter four presents the results, listing findings and general observations. Chapter five provides a discussion, interpreting the findings with reference to relevant sources. The final chapter summarizes the study's results and offers recommendations for future research.

2. Literature review

The chapter reviewed literature on sustainability in restaurant businesses, including sustainable food service strategies, such as ethical sourcing, food preparation, and serving. It also introduced Social Practice Theory as a useful framework for examining these practices through the interaction of materials, competencies, and meanings.

2.1 Embedding sustainability in restaurant businesses

The restaurant sector can be conceptualized as a business model (Dickerson and Hassanien, 2018) that actively shapes consumer attitudes and behaviors (Aghaei et al., 2026) by influencing how food is sourced, prepared, and presented. Restaurant professionals, including owners, managers, and chefs, play a key role as change-makers within the food system by influencing food sourcing, preparation, waste management, and communicating values to consumers with their knowledge and experience (Richardson and Fernqvist, 2024; Garcia et al., 2023).

In the business model, these professionals are expected to possess extensive knowledge of the industry, including food and beverage operations (Cousins et al., 2019; Okeiyi et al., 1994), hospitality and tourism management (Barrows and Bosselman, 2013), and culinary practices (Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou, 2022) along with an understanding of the market structure, availability of raw materials, capital resources, and skilled personnel. Many restaurants fail due to a lack of this knowledge and education (Camillo et al., 2008; Parsa et al., 2005). Therefore, sustainable restaurants function as responsible intermediaries between food production and consumption while also inspiring consumers towards more sustainable food practices.

2.2 Sustainable food service strategies

Sustainable food services encompass multiple categories. From a restaurant perspective, daily operational activities include sourcing, storage, food processing or preparation, and serving practices (Baldwin et al., 2011). Beyond kitchen operations, essential elements of a sustainable food service environment include reducing single-use plastics, utilizing energy- and water-efficient equipment, adopting green cleaning methods, sourcing certified products, and implementing waste diversion programs such as recycling, composting, and food donation (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2025). These practices are operationalized through managerial decisions (Ishan et al., 2022), menu development (Kumar, n.d.), customer communication (Kang and Hyun, 2012),

supply chain relationships (Shi and Liao, 2013), and approaches to delivering food experiences.

Existing literature highlights a wide range of dimensions associated with sustainable food systems, which can create operational complexity for restaurants. These dimensions include environmental impact, ethical sourcing, dietary diversity, reduced meat consumption, and animal welfare (Dalmeny and Reynolds, 2007). While these factors collectively contribute to a comprehensive vision of sustainability, they also raise questions regarding transparency and the extent to which such practices can be consistently implemented (Freeman, 2011). This is particularly evident in efforts to reduce meat consumption; such initiatives are not only difficult to assess, but they may conflict with consumer demand (De Bakker and Dagevos, 2012), especially in the European context, which is characterized by relatively high levels of meat consumption (Sans and Combris, 2015). Consequently, restaurants must carefully balance ecological imperatives with regional gastronomic tourism demands and consumer preferences to successfully integrate sustainability into their core business models.

2.2.1 Ethical sourcing

From a restaurant perspective, sustainable sourcing involves a conscious shift away from traditional cost-driven procurement towards ethical procurement (Johansson, 2025). It tends towards a balanced approach that considers environmental impact alongside financial viability. Furthermore, this can be defined as purchasing ingredients that reduce carbon emissions through shorter transport distances (Striebig et al., 2019), protect biodiversity via organic and chemical-free farming (Priyadarshani and Chawla, n.d.), and promote worker welfare through transparent supply chains. Restaurants can reduce their ecological footprint (Liu et al., 2022) while giving eco-conscious diners the transparency and authenticity they expect.

The definition of ‘local food’ remains a subject of ongoing debate within academic literature (Hubbard, 2018). Sims (2013) views local food as products that embody a region’s distinct cultural identity and provide tourists with authentic heritage experiences. Conversely, other researchers argue that geographic context is not the sole determinant, suggesting instead that cuisines are continuously reshaped by the dynamic interplay between local and global forces (Massey, 2005). Furthermore, equating the local with the traditional can cause conceptual confusion; the modern adaptation of traditional cuisines often distorts what is truly considered local food (Bessière, 1998). Taking a historical perspective, Fields (2003) traces the evolution of culinary traditions, illustrating how trade, migration, and technological innovations have permanently intertwined global and local food landscapes. Ultimately, as Harrington (2005) notes, true locality is a fluid concept, continuously molded by the unique environmental and cultural conditions of a specific region.

Operationally, organizations like the Green Restaurant Association (GRA) (2022) provide clearer parameters, classifying greens, herbs, animal products, and ingredients grown on-site or within a 100-mile radius as local and within 300 miles as regional. Under the GRA's restaurant certification system, implementing these localized sourcing practices earns restaurants specific sustainability points. Similarly, within the European context, sustainable sourcing is systematically driven by formal state and independent bodies. The Swedish Food Agency (*Livsmedelsverket*) has implemented regulations requiring restaurants to provide information on the origin of certain meat ingredients, such as where beef, pork, lamb, goat, and poultry come from (Livsmedelsverket, 2025). The Swedish Board of Agriculture (*Jordbruksverket*) (Statens jordbruksverk, 2025) and the National Public Procurement Authority (*Upphandlingsmyndigheten*) (Upphandlingsmyndigheten, 2024) establish legal and financial frameworks to favor short, regional supply chains. For instance, the Swedish KRAV restaurant certification system rewards operations based on the percentage of sustainable and organic ingredients used, explicitly including certified Swedish game meat and regional produce as part of its sustainability tiers (KRAV, 2026).

Additionally, national origin labels like *Från Sverige* (From Sweden) guarantee that animal products are born, raised, and processed entirely within the country, establishing an institutional framework for tracing local supply chains (Svenskmärkning AB, 2025). Shafieizadeh and Tao (2020) examine how menu information about local food influences restaurant selection and how it affects customers' restaurant choices by enhancing perceptions of corporate social responsibility, transparency, and trust. Integrating these localized benchmarks directly applies to eco-conscious consumers; indeed, a mutually reinforcing relationship exists between green customers and sustainable restaurant operators, turning these patrons into vital operational assets (Alamsyah and Febriani, 2020; Ahmed et al., 2023). Because these consumers feel a personal responsibility for planetary health (Sarmiento and Hanandeh, 2018), their patronage drives interconnected social, economic, and environmental value within the food service industry.

All this literature reveals the importance of using locally sourced ingredients in restaurant menus as an important marketing strategy (Hubbard, 2018). Sustainable sourcing in restaurants depends on the extent to which establishments rely on local, seasonal, and organic ingredients, which are further influenced by factors such as availability, cost, convenience, and consumer demand. Some restaurants may engage in on-site food production such as kitchen gardens or large-scale gardens, as a way of integrating production into their operations. However, most ingredients are sourced externally in collaboration with neighbouring farms or local suppliers (Welter, 2012).

2.2.2 Food preparation

Food preparation encompasses a range of stages between sourcing and serving, extending beyond the act of cooking itself. It involves strategic decisions regarding menu design (Kumar, n.d.), often shaped by the availability of ingredients, particularly in restaurants that prioritize local sourcing and seasonality (Mitchell, 2025).

Sustainable food preparation also emphasizes minimizing waste through approaches such as whole-ingredient utilization (e.g., root-to-leaf practices) and the creative use of by-products and leftovers to generate added value (Renfors and Wendt, 2024). These practices require a high level of knowledge, skill, creativity, adaptability, and patience from restaurant professionals (Wellton et al., 2017). The Swedish Food Agency (Livsmedelsverket) has implemented guidelines on reducing food waste through better planning, storage, and cooking (Livsmedelsverket, 2025). It is the owner's responsibility to buy ingredients that fit the storage facilities and also to ensure the proper storage of cooked food without discarding it.

2.2.3 Food serving

The outcome of sustainable food preparation is expressed and communicated through the dishes. This includes reflecting sustainability values on the plate, conveying the story behind every ingredient and its preparation methods, and fostering a sense of regional identity and local pride (Junkrachang et al., 2021; Timothy and Ron, 2013). At the same time, these practices must be balanced with the need to meet customer expectations and ensure the overall dining experience. Food serving may represent one of the most critical strategies through which practitioners can position the destination as a brand and strengthen gastronomic tourism (Karagiannis and Andrinis, 2021). The term practitioners refers to restaurant owners, managers, and chefs, who possess in-depth knowledge of their food environment (Wellton and Lainpelto, 2021; Sharma et al., 2021) and are well positioned to influence individuals' food choices.

Menus, for instance, may highlight the origin of ingredients or change regularly to reflect seasonality, thereby making sourcing practices more visible to consumers (Mitchell, 2025). Similarly, restaurants increasingly use platforms such as Instagram and Facebook to share information about the farmers they collaborate with, the ingredients they use and where they come from, and daily preparations, enhancing transparency and engagement. In addition, the limited food options in restaurants can be an advantage, as they guide consumer choices; when these options are sustainable, consumers are more easily directed toward responsible consumption (Weijers et al., 2025).

Restaurants adopt diverse approaches to communicating sustainability when serving food to diners (Olivieri et al., 2026). The co-created interventions outlined in the study by Weijers et al. (2025) demonstrate how behavioral change strategies can be operationalized within restaurant settings through subtle nudges. These include increasing the visibility of the sustainable dishes, using attractive and descriptive labels, and positioning sustainable options as the default choice to simplify decision-making. Additionally, restaurants can leverage social proof strategies - such as highlighting the popularity of sustainable menus- to reinforce eco-conscious normative behavior among consumers. This can be operationalized through storytelling during staff-customer interactions, digital engagement tools like QR codes, and targeted chef recommendations. Furthermore, plate composition strategies can nudge consumer choice by giving plant-based dishes and sustainably sourced ingredients structural prominence over animal-based dishes (Weijers et al., 2025).

Storytelling plays a central role in conveying sustainability values, as it allows restaurants to communicate the origins of ingredients, production processes, and the rationale behind specific dishes. This is particularly relevant when chefs are directly involved in sourcing activities, such as foraging, harvesting, or working with local producers, which can strengthen authenticity and credibility. Several studies have revealed storytelling as a powerful mechanism for creating meaning, thereby influencing human thoughts and decision-making (Moscardo, 2020). Also, storytelling enhances meaningful tourism experiences, as these experiences are shaped by emotional, relational, and reflective processes through which individuals construct meaning by interpreting and integrating experiences into personal narratives. (Câmara et al., 2023; Vohs et al., 2019).

Moreover, staff interactions with guests represent an important channel through which sustainability narratives are communicated (Cavagnaro et al., 2018; Van Rheede and Decker, 2016), especially in establishments that adopt a team-based or staff-driven service approach. These interactions and the hospitality approach can influence how consumers interpret and co-create sustainable values while also fostering trust among diners (Leask et al., 2019).

Numerous studies have examined restaurants from multiple perspectives. A similar study by Markowska et al. (2011) demonstrates that Nordic gourmet restaurants create value through restaurateurs' experiences, local stories, and regional identity, highlighting how restaurants contribute to regional development and gastronomic tourism. The study is particularly valuable in showing how restaurants can attract visitors through activities such as trips to the origins of food, cooking experiences, and collaboration with travel agencies. However, its focus on rural gourmet restaurants limits its applicability to urban contexts, where conditions, customer expectations and operational dynamics may differ. A case study in Australia explored various aspects of sustainability based on twenty case

studies and identified all 17 SDGs within the restaurant context, which supports the tourism discipline (Higgins-Desbiolles and Wijesinghe, 2019). Another study has explored restaurant management and service excellence in Scanian fine-dining contexts (Slodnik et al., 2009), but there is limited research on sustainability narratives in relation to gastronomic tourism.

These studies have inspired further exploration of how restaurants communicate sustainability through everyday practices; however, there remains a gap in understanding how restaurants contribute to strengthening gastronomic tourism while meeting tourists' expectations through a broader sustainability perspective. This study examines sustainability across the food supply chain, including sourcing, cooking, and serving, with a focus on the internal environment of restaurants.

2.3 Theoretical framework

This section presents the theoretical framework guiding the results of the study. It introduces the Social Practice Theory (SPT) and explains its relevance to understanding sustainability practices within the restaurant environment. Particular attention is given to the three interconnected elements of practices-materials, competencies, and meanings- which are used to interpret how sustainable practices are performed and experienced in the context of gastronomic tourism.

2.3.1 Social practice theory in sustainability research

Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist who pioneered the framework, concludes that social practices are reproduced through everyday actions that feel natural to individuals but are strongly influenced by society and history (Bourdieu, 2020). In this case study, Social Practice Theory (SPT) is adapted as the theoretical framework, as it views social practices as shared patterns of action that shape how people behave, what they do, and how they make sense of the world around them (Shove et al., 2012).

There is no single, unified approach to SPT (Schatzki, 2001), and some scholars understand practices by focusing on different elements that come together to shape them (Reckwitz, 2002; Shove and Pantzar, 2005). SPT shifts the analytical focus away from individual, rational decision-making and towards the routine performance of everyday activities (Shove and Wards, 2002). From this perspective, practitioners have greater potential to convey sustainability to consumers, as they follow the established ways of doing things; for example, a guest choosing a sustainable dish is not just making an individual decision, but is influenced by the structural dining practice. Consumers follow the menu structure,

choose what is highlighted, and trust the chef's recommendations without conscious thought.

In this theory, **practices** can be considered a **unit of analysis**, showing how different elements come together in everyday activities as routines or patterns in a specific place (Spaargaren et al., 2016). According to Shove et al. (2012), there are three main **elements of practices**: materials, competencies, and meanings. This theoretical relationship is visually mapped out in **Figure 1**.

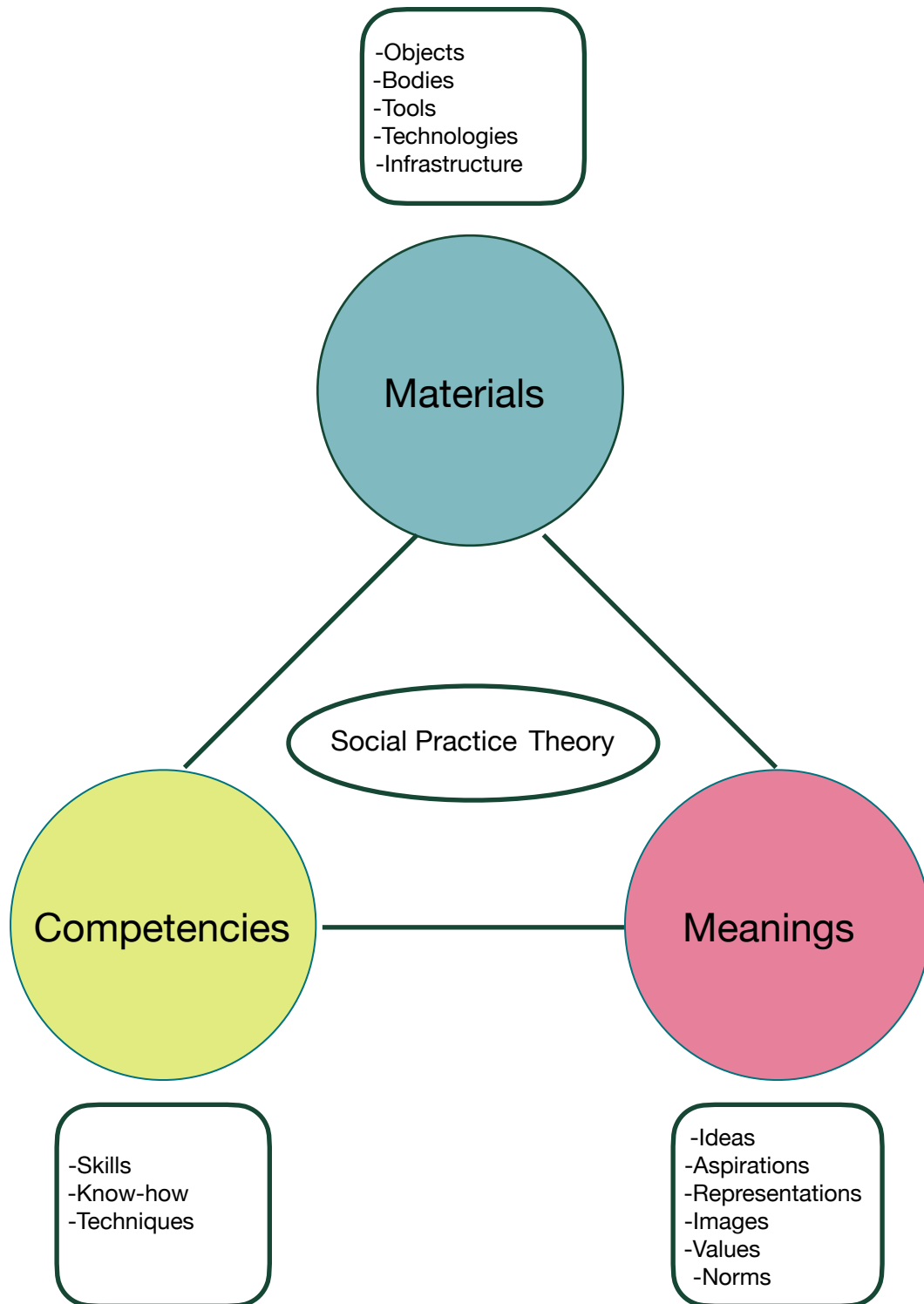


Figure 1. The elements of a practice (Created by the author, adapted from Shove et al., 2012)

Focusing on the **material** element of SPT, practices are understood as being shaped by physical and tangible components such as objects, bodies, tools, technologies, and infrastructure (Hennchen, 2019). Within this study, materials are reflected in factors including local and seasonal ingredients, menu designs, food waste, energy and water, and supply chains, all of which influence how sustainability-related practices are performed.

The emphasis on education, curiosity, and knowledge highlights the role of **competencies**; the skills, know-how, and practical understanding individuals need to participate effectively in food-related practices. Richardson and Fernqvist (2024) argue that restaurant actors emphasized that both they and their customers need sufficient knowledge to make informed food choices, understand sustainability issues, and adopt new ways of engaging in the food system.

At the same time, stimulating curiosity and promoting learning also connect to **meanings**, as they shape how people value food, sustainability, and their own role within the food system. When restaurants place information on menus, organize cooking classes or training sessions, and actively interact with customers, they are not only transferring knowledge but also influencing cultural understandings and norms around food consumption (Richardson and Fernqvist, 2024).

Understanding the key elements involved in practices is essential to analyze the degree of sustainability in a restaurant and the factors shaping practitioners' daily work. SPT is particularly relevant to this case study as it shows how restaurant environments shape dining practices, enabling an understanding of how sustainability is structured, experienced, and gradually transformed within gastronomic tourism contexts.

3. Methodology of the study

This chapter presents the methodology used to investigate how restaurant professionals' everyday practices and understandings of sustainability contribute to sustainable gastronomic tourism development in Scania, Sweden. It describes the research approach and the rationale for selecting Scania and the participating restaurants and interviewees. The chapter also outlines the data collection process, ethical considerations, and the procedures used to analyze and interpret the interview data. Finally, it explains how the analysis was initially informed by grounded theory techniques and subsequently interpreted through the concepts of Social Practice Theory (SPT), particularly materials, competencies, and meanings.

3.1 Approach

This is a qualitative case study of selected restaurants in Scania, Sweden. A case study can be interpreted as an in-depth, detailed examination of a specific subject within its real-life context rather than aiming for broad generalization (Stake, 2008). It can be an organization, an individual, a group of people, communities, occasions, or subunits within the primary unit. A qualitative approach is well suited for exploring how participants perceive and experience a phenomenon in depth (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021).

For this study, primary data were collected from interviews. The literature review was conducted using resources at the SLU library, including peer-reviewed articles, journal papers, and e-books accessed through databases such as Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Scopus via the SLU library.

In the data collection process, a series of interviews were conducted with restaurant owners, co-owners, or chefs at the selected restaurants.

3.2 Selection of research locations

Beyond Scania's agricultural richness and distinctive foodscape, the region was selected as the research setting due to the researcher's practical convenience and the feasibility of conducting on-site interviews with participants within the given time frame. In addition, Scania was considered for several reasons: it is one of the major agricultural regions in the country, has easy access for tourists from many European countries, and has many food companies that restaurants can use as suppliers. Also, considering a specific region in Sweden with similar resources, a unique landscape, a group of people, and similar challenges will provide more general narratives from restaurant professionals and facilitate building theory in an organized way.

The cities included in the study were Malmö, Lund, Båstad, Skurup and Ystad, representing a diverse range of urban contexts within Scania. Malmö, is the largest city in the region with a distinct multicultural profile (Visit Sweden, 2025), Lund is the centre for research and higher education (Visit Sweden, 2024), while Båstad and Ystad are two of the main tourist destinations in the region with a broad variety of high-class restaurants (Visit Sweden, 2026; Visit sweden, n.d.), and Skurup is one of the important agricultural regions and is well known for its strong food culture based on local ingredients (Skurup Municipality, 2026).

The restaurants in this study offer traditional Swedish, modern Nordic, or Scandinavian cuisines, and they limit dependency on imports as much as possible by using local ingredients in traditional authentic cuisines that represent the region in their menus and follow seasonality throughout the year. Scania can be considered a highly diversified region, as people from different ethnic groups reside there, and there are several international restaurants in addition to Swedish restaurants.

3.3 Selection criteria of restaurants/ interviewees

The basic selection criteria for the restaurants were their type of cuisine and geographical location. The relevance of each restaurant to the case study was then considered, with particular focus on restaurants engaged in sustainable practices, which was the most critical criterion from an outsider's perspective. To assess this, publicly available information, including restaurant websites and menus, social media, awards, certifications or other forms of recognition, as well as restaurant concepts and branding, was considered. Variation in concept and scale was also taken into account, with a mix of fine dining, casual dining, and other restaurant concepts included to capture diverse perspectives. Restaurants were contacted by email and telephone using the contact details provided on their official websites and Instagram accounts.

Table 1 provides an overview of the restaurants included in the study, including their locations, concepts, types of cuisine, meal service, and the roles of the interviewees.

Table 1. Restaurant overview

Establishment and activity	Location	Concept(s)	Respondents	Type of cuisine	Meal service
Restaurant (R1)	Båstad	Fine-dining, farm to table	Head chef/ Owner	New nordic	Dinner
Restaurant (R2)	Malmö	Fine-dining	Restaurant chef	New nordic	Fixed menu- Lunch and dinner
Restaurant and café (R3)	Lund	Within cultural establishment, casual fine dining	Restaurant chef	Modern European	Set menu- Lunch and dinner
Bistro and wine bar (R4)	Malmö	Casual fine dining	Owner/ chef	Modern Swedish	Tasting menu- Dinner
Lunch restaurant (R5)	Lund	Canteen/ casual dining	Owner/ chef	New Nordic	Lunch
Restaurant (R6)	Malmö	Casual fine dining	Manager/ chef	Modern scandinavian	Dinner
Restaurant, cafe and hotel (R7)	Ystad	Casual dining	Co-owner, chef and sommelier	Classical Swedish	Dinner
Restaurant and catering business (R8)	Skurup	Upscale casual dining	Manager/ chef	Contemporary european	Breakfast, lunch and dinner

3.4 Process of the data collection

Empirical data based on narratives from restaurant professionals offers insights into real-life experiences, enabling a deep, detailed understanding of the phenomenon under study (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021).

Eight semi-structured interviews (SSIs) were conducted with each participant, and the average time per SSI was 41.38 minutes. Seven interviews were conducted in person, and one interview was conducted online. Out of the seven in-person interviews, five were conducted at the participants' own restaurants, one at the

respondent's private residence, and one at SLU Alnarp. Face-to-face interviews provide better communication and transparency than interviewing by telephone or online, and they allow the researcher to explore the organization where the respondent was actually engaged (Schober, 2018).

SSI is particularly valuable because it balances guidance with flexibility. They allow the researcher to follow a set of prepared questions (Appendix 1) while also adapting to the conversation, making it possible to explore participants' individual experiences, meanings and perspectives in greater depth. This makes SSI especially suitable when the aim is not to generalize, but to understand nuanced, context-specific viewpoints such as how the respondents interpret and communicate sustainability in their work (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021).

While the general objective of the research outlines the overall population, the study sample requires clearer specification. Including individuals or organizations with relevant expertise, experience, and access to resources enables the inclusion of more informed and diverse perspectives on the subject matter (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). Unlike quantitative research, where the sample size is determined in advance, qualitative research treats sample size as flexible and guided by the richness of the data (Trotter, 2012).

3.5 Ethical consideration

The study adhered to established ethical guidelines, ensuring the data were used solely for academic purposes, with no commercial intent, and in alignment with the research objectives. A written consent form was provided to all voluntary participants, including the researcher's identity and a brief description of the study (Appendix 2). It also contained a consent checklist, allowing participants to indicate their agreement or disagreement with specific areas, after which the signed form was returned before participation.

Although participants would have liked to expose their identities, anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained in the study. Anonymity is important in qualitative research because it protects participants and strengthens the quality of the data and academic output (Kang, 2023). This is especially important when the data may involve personal opinions, professional practices, and potentially sensitive topics (Kang, 2023). This method also enhances the credibility and reliability of the data, as it encourages more genuine, detailed, and open responses from participants (Almusaed et al., 2025; Dougherty, 2021).

3.6 Data analysis

The interview guide was developed based on the research aim and literature review and was designed to be open-ended. All narrative data in this study were collected through interviews, enabling the observation of visual cues alongside participants' verbal responses. The interviews were audio-recorded with the full consent of the participants, allowing for more effective communication without interrupting the natural flow of the conversation while ensuring accurate data capture for subsequent analysis. Audio recordings were conducted using a mobile phone and computer linked to each other; this integrated setup enabled simultaneous recording and automatic synchronization, providing a practical and reliable approach while ensuring immediate backup and reducing the risk of data loss. [Otter.ai](#) was used as the automated transcription software for the analysis. To ensure familiarity with the data and to enhance accuracy, the transcripts were reviewed twice. The first reading was conducted alongside the original audio recordings, during which the transcripts were manually checked and corrected where necessary. A second review of the transcripts was then undertaken to organize the data methodologically, aligning it with emerging themes and key ideas (Kabir et al., 2025).

This methodology was inspired by grounded theory techniques (Green et al., 2014). Initial codes were generated inductively from the interview transcripts to identify meaningful segments in the data, and similar codes were grouped into broader categories and themes. Finally, selective coding was used to identify overarching major themes relevant to sustainable gastronomic destination development, which were used for interpretation in the results chapter. Coding and data organization were supported using NVivo (Hutchison et al., 2010).

To establish a comprehensive analytical framework, a secondary deductive coding phase was executed to systematically link the inductively generated themes to the core dimensions of **Social Practice Theory (SPT)** (Shove et al., 2012). This hybrid process of combining data-driven themes with a theory-led framework follows the rigorous thematic analysis process (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Rather than treating the data purely descriptively, the emerging codes were operationalized as active components that structure, maintain, or transform restaurant operations. The empirical data were mapped into the three interconnected elements of the SPT matrix as below.

1. **Materials (Physical and tangible elements):** Coded data related to physical infrastructure, restaurant layout, local and seasonal ingredients, printed menus, waste management tools, and supply chain logistics were categorized under this element. This allowed for an analysis of how physical objects and materials constrain sustainable practices within the restaurant environment.

2. **Competencies (Knowledge and skills):** Qualitative segments detailing culinary knowledge (e.g., food safety, seasonal menu adaptation), professional kitchen techniques (e.g., preservation, waste management), staff training, supplier communication, and customer education were grouped here. This focused the analysis on know-how and professional routines required by restaurant actors to execute sustainability.
3. **Meanings (Ideas and perceptions):** Codes addressing abstract ideas, practical interpretations of sustainability, food nostalgia, destination brand image, cultural values, and emotional connections to the culinary landscape were catalogued under this dimension. This captured the shared understandings, social norms, and symbolic attachments that motivate and give purpose to the practices.

This systematic alignment between the theoretical framework and the empirical themes- which correspond directly to the themes presented in Table 2)- ensured that the unit of analysis remained focused on the routine performance of everyday activities, successfully bridging the gap between raw field data and broader sociological interpretations of sustainable gastronomic tourism.

4. Results

This chapter presents the empirical findings from the interviews with restaurant professionals in Scania. The results explore how sustainability is understood and enacted through everyday restaurant practices and how they relate to sustainable gastronomic tourism development. The findings are organized around the main themes that emerged from the interview data, including understandings of sustainability, sustainability in everyday restaurant practices, local and seasonal sourcing, waste management, communication of sustainability to diners, and structural barriers to sustainability. The findings are interpreted through SPT, with particular attention to the interrelationships between three elements: materials, competencies, and meanings.

4.1 How restaurant professionals understand sustainability

An interview with a Michelin-starred chef provided valuable insights into environmental sustainability, extending beyond the commonly emphasized issue of food waste management in sustainability discourse. This aligns with the guidelines on the use of chemicals and pollution, as well as reduced water usage, in Target 12.4 of SDG 12, as well as the GRA (The Global Goals, 2025; Green Restaurant Association, 2022). Under the framework of SPT, this shift away from chemical-heavy cleaning toward manual, low-water methods represents a reconfiguration of both **Materials** (chemical agents and water) and **Competencies** (the staff know-how required to clean effectively with less chemicals and water). The respondent explained that:

A large part of it is also about cleaning and chemicals, [...] where we use manual cleaning [...]. You can clean well with just a little bit of water, depending on what you are cleaning.

-Interview with R1, head chef and owner

The restaurant co-owner described sustainability practices through the reuse of second-hand interiors, furniture, and kitchen equipment. This is also highlighted in “Things to Do” under SDG 12, “Buy second-hand whenever you can” (The Global Goals, 2025). By sourcing these materials from auctions and businesses going out of operation, the restaurant reduced reliance on newly manufactured goods while extending the functional life of existing resources. This practice reflects circular economy principles, where reuse and resource efficiency are integrated into both aesthetic design and operational infrastructure. Additionally, the restaurant contributes to both environmental benefits and cost savings. From the perspective of SPT, selecting second-hand infrastructure redefines the **Materials** of the restaurant, and it shapes the **Meanings** of the SPT by embedding a value of resource conservation. The respondent put forward that:

Most of the interior is actually second-hand. We buy it from auctions and when other hotels or restaurants go out of business. [...] Also, a lot of the kitchen equipment is second-hand.

-Interview with R7, co-owner, chef, and sommelier

The chef of the restaurant, which operates within a cultural establishment, stated that the restaurant's sustainability practices extend into its **Material** environment through the use of handmade plates, Swedish-made glassware, locally designed furniture, consideration of clothing, and other operational materials. These objects are not treated as neutral tools, but as ethically and symbolically meaningful resources reflecting values of locality, craftsmanship, traceability, and reduced reliance on mass-produced goods imported from somewhere else. In this way, sustainability is materially embedded throughout the restaurant's dining infrastructure and aesthetic environment. The respondent reflected on this broader understanding of sustainability:

Day by day, we learn, and it becomes clearer what sustainability is and how we think about it. Is it only about the food and the drinks?

-Interview with R3, chef

One of the restaurant managers emphasized the importance of traditional culinary methods such as curing, smoking, drying, and salting as part of the restaurant's sustainable practices. This suggests that sustainability is not only understood as sourcing local ingredients, but also as preserving traditional methods, where sustainability is associated with regional identity, authenticity, and Nordic food culture. This showcase highlights the deep intersection of **Competencies** and **Meanings** in sustainable gastronomic tourism. Under SPT, preserving these historic methods requires specialized culinary knowledge and professional kitchen techniques. Simultaneously, by using these old cooking skills to highlight Nordic products, the restaurant directly shapes the brand image of the destination. The respondent emphasized:

We try to work with old methods of cooking skills, like curing, smoking, drying, and salting things [...]. So the concept is to bring to the customers, like showcase what the best products are right now in the Nordic countries.

-Interview with R6, manager and chef

Within SPT, the element of **Meaning** encompasses the symbolic ideas, cultural identities, and emotional significance attached to a given practice. Interview findings reveal that for some restaurateurs, the meaning of sustainability extends beyond resource efficiency to include cultural sustainability- specifically, the preservation and revitalization of regional food heritage. By reintroducing traditional dishes, the restaurant contributes to maintaining Swedish culinary heritage, strengthening local gastronomic identity while offering a sense of cultural memory. It creates a shared meaning where older guests experience nostalgia and a sense of belonging while younger guests undergo an educational enculturation into their own food history. The respondent described this motivation:

Our menu is very classical Swedish. We have a lot of old traditional dishes that most older people appreciate; younger people don't really know what it is. So it's forgotten. And that's why we want to bring some dishes back.

-Interview with R7, co-owner, chef, and sommelier

By consciously reintroducing historical flavor profiles and forgotten recipes, the practice of dining shifts from a purely commercial setting to an act of heritage transmission. Crucially, these traditional dishes function as **Material** expressions of local food culture, while also evoking nostalgia and collective memory among local consumers. Conversely, for external visitors, the value of the dish is constructed through pedagogical narrative and historical storytelling, transforming the meal into an educational asset. The participant elaborates further:

The local population [...] is really happy to see dishes that most of them grew up with or ate during childhood. It brings back a lot of joy and memories to them. [...] to the tourists, we can tell the history of the dishes, where they originated, where they were made, the recipes, and how old the dishes are?

-Interview with R7, co-owner, chef, and sommelier

Within SPT, the element of **Meaning** is not static; it undergoes continuous socio-historical shifts as cultural values evolve (Shove et al., 2012). Interview findings demonstrate that the symbolic value of traditional dishes has undergone a profound reinterpretation within Swedish society. While historical culinary practices were once tethered to negative associations of economic hardship, modern gastronomic frameworks have reintroduced them as symbols of resourcefulness and culinary prestige. This was evident in the following statement:

After the Second World War, when they started making money in Sweden, they did not want to eat the old-fashioned foods anymore because they were equated with poverty and hard times. But there's a lot of wisdom and many really tasty, fun things in that food culture.

-Interview with R4, owner and chef

This transition highlights a process of cultural re-valorization. The postwar aversion to traditional foods- driven by a societal aspiration toward modernization and convenience- is being actively deconstructed by contemporary chefs. By framing traditional gastronomy around concepts of inherent wisdom and artisanal value rather than scarcity, restaurateurs are successfully transforming historical survival foods into high-status, premium culinary experiences.

Furthermore, this negotiation of **Meaning** extends to how actors define and prioritize sustainability in conflicting ethical imperatives. When forced to navigate the structural compromises in the modern market, restaurateurs construct their own localized meanings of ecological responsibility, occasionally stepping away from globalized certification frameworks in favor of regional proximity. As participant R7 explains, the carbon reduction of short supply chains is frequently considered more meaningful than standardized organic labelling:

We believe that it's better to have a local product that's not organic than to have an organic product that you have to ship. So we cut much of the transport emissions also.

-Interview with R7, co-owner, chef, and sommelier

This deliberate trade-off illustrates that the meaning of “sustainable food” is highly contextual. Rather than passively accepting regulatory definitions (such as organic certifications), practitioners take things into their own hands by redefining sustainability around geographic proximity and transport emission reduction. Consequently, these findings suggest that the success of sustainable gastronomy depends on the continuous, active construction of new cultural meanings that value historical heritage while practically addressing modern environmental challenges.

Within SPT, the physical availability of raw materials- the **Material** element- directly shapes what practices are possible in the workspace (Shove et al., 2012). Interview findings reveal that menu decisions are heavily restricted by the decline of local food systems and volatile ingredient prices. However, these physical limitations do not stop sustainable practices; instead, they force chefs to use their values to find creative solutions. When facing an ecological shortage, the choice of what to serve shifts from a simple automated order to a conscious compromise. Participant R7 describes how the physical absence of a local staple like cod forces the restaurant to rethink its ingredient base, balancing immediate costs with a deep sense of environmental responsibility:

The fish is a problem here because there's not a lot of fish here. But we mostly use alternative fish. So we don't use cod; we use saithe, which is not overfished and also a cheaper alternative.

-Interview with R7, co-owner, chef, and sommelier

This deliberate choice highlights how **Material** constraints and ethical **Meanings** interact in daily practice. By stepping away from overfished premium species and substituting them with less popular, more affordable alternatives like Saithe, the restaurant manages to protect vulnerable ecosystems while keeping its food costs manageable. This demonstrates that navigating an unstable local food system requires a constant balance: chefs must adapt to shrinking material resources while standing firm in their commitment to tackling the modern environmental challenges.

The Michelin-starred chef described sustainability as involving a gradual transition towards plant-based offerings through reduced reliance on animal protein and increased incorporation of vegetables. This reflects a **Material** element of meals, supported by **Competencies**- requiring in- depth culinary skills, careful recipe adjustments, and clever menu development. At the level of **Meanings**, the participant also sought to challenge regional dietary norms characterized by high meat and carbohydrate consumption by promoting plant-

based dishes as more balanced and sustainable alternatives. The chef elaborated on this approach:

A key focus is reducing reliance on animal protein and incorporating more vegetables into the menu. In this region, diets tend to be high in meat and carbohydrates, with fewer vegetables. It would be valuable to contribute to changing this pattern by developing dishes that are more plant-based and balanced.

-Interview with R1, head chef and owner

This vision is shared across different types of restaurant operations, showing a common industry approach to guide diners toward more resource-efficient choices. Participant R8 similarly emphasizes the importance of increasing vegetable consumption and reducing the reliance on meat as a means of promoting more sustainable food practices. He further emphasized this approach:

It might be some more vegetables instead of more meat [...]. I try more and more to get people to use more, eat more vegetables because it's more sustainable and more efficient.

-Interview with R8, manager and chef

Collectively, these findings indicate that restaurant professionals conceptualize sustainability as encompassing more than food waste management and local sourcing. Their perspectives include resource utilization within the restaurant, traditional culinary methods, cultural heritage, and evolving ethical eating patterns. These insights further demonstrate the interconnectedness of materials, competencies, and meanings in shaping sustainable restaurant practices.

4.2 Sustainability in everyday restaurant practices

Based on the practice theory, the empirical findings were organized into three interconnected elements: materials, competencies, and meanings. These elements were interpreted from the interview data and are presented in the table below to illustrate priorities given by restaurant professionals in their everyday operations (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Application of social practice theory to key sustainability practices identified in the restaurants

Theme/ practice	Materials	Competencies	Meanings	Chapter
1. Local sourcing	Local ingredients, seasonal produce, supplier networks	Knowledge of sourcing, menu adaptation, logistics coordination	Freshness, locality, environmental responsibility	4.3
2. Waste management	Food leftovers, seasonal produce, storage containers, portion sizes, bottles and jars, storage facilities	Portion planning, inventory management, menu planning, reuse of ingredients, Preservation knowledge, seasonal planning	Resource efficiency, environmental responsibility, minimising food waste, sustainability awareness	4.4
3. Sustainability communication	Traditional dishes, menus, social media, dining environment, staff	Recipe knowledge, communication skills, storytelling, menu adaption	Destination branding, transparency, education, nostalgia, heritage	4.5

Within sustainable restaurant practices, sourcing local ingredients, maintaining strong relationships with local suppliers, and adhering to seasonality in menu decisions were prominent across all restaurants. Owners and chefs demonstrated the competencies necessary to manage material elements through professional knowledge, experience, adaptability, and effective coordination with suppliers and intermediaries. These practices foster meanings such as the consumption of fresh, high-quality food, regional pride, and a sense of environmental responsibility by illustrating contributions to climate change mitigation.

Waste management was another practice followed by restaurants in different ways specific to them. Even though the interviewees did not provide evidence regarding plate food waste and kitchen waste, all of them had good proactive and mitigation measures to minimize waste generation from food sourcing. They had the knowledge necessary to preserve seasonal ingredients throughout the year, reuse leftovers in different ways, carry out portion planning, and manage inventory. These practices contribute to meanings related to social, economic, and environmental sustainability awareness and resource efficiency.

Communicating sustainability to diners is the most critical part of gastronomic tourism, and everyone has a unique approach, or multiple approaches, within their food service environments. Restaurants conveyed material elements such as menus, traditional dishes, social media, dining environment, and staff involvement, along with competencies such as knowledge of menu decisions, traditional recipes, and storytelling for diners. These reflect meanings including destination branding, transparency in restaurant operations, education for staff as well as diners, a sentimental feeling for the past often associated with pleasant memories, experiences, places, traditions, or foods, and pride in cultural heritage.

Following the above thematic summary of Table 2, chapters 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 delve deeper into each respective theme and its sub-themes, unpacking their specific empirical findings and theoretical implications.

4.3 Local and seasonal sourcing

Local and seasonal sourcing emerged as an important aspect of sustainable restaurant practices. Restaurant professionals described sustainability in relation to where ingredients are sourced, their seasonal availability, and their relationships with farmers, producers, and other regional suppliers.

4.3.1 Local sourcing

A fine-dining restaurant argues for a transition from purchasing externally produced beverages to producing drinks in-house, including juices and *kombucha*. This practice involved the **Material** transformation of ingredients such as berries, spices, lemon juice, sugar, and salt into customized beverage products. In-house production also relied on **Competencies** related to flavor development, preparation, and cost management. Beyond economic benefits, the respondent associated this practice with added value and creativity, as beverages could be adapted according to the restaurant's preferences and identity. The chef described how this transition took place:

When I started working here, we offered apple juice or kombucha. They were from local companies, or sometimes not local, and now we make them ourselves. It's a cost reduction for us, and you can also add value because you can actually change the drinks as you want. So we add spices, berries, sugar, salt, or lemon juice to infuse something else. [...] We have gin production here and also whiskey production.

-Interview with R2, chef

Local sourcing can take different forms within restaurants, and such practices reflect an effort to maintain greater control over ingredients and production while creating value within the restaurant.

4.3.2 Seasonal menus

The emphasis on local produce is closely tied to seasonality, as highlighted by the restaurant chef, who revealed that menus are regularly adapted according to availability, which aligns with the second aim of the New Nordic Cuisine Manifesto: “to reflect the changes of the seasons in the meal we take”(New Nordic Food Manifesto, n.d.). These findings demonstrate the importance of **Materials** in shaping sustainable restaurant practices, as menu planning is directly influenced by seasonality. This indicates that menu decisions are materially constrained by harvest cycles and regional production patterns. The respondent illustrated this seasonal adaptation:

We are going to see some asparagus and rhubarb this season, and those two things are coming onto the menu soon as we get them in the season. But then, as the season comes to an end, they will go off the menu, and something else will replace them. In August, we have the Swedish sweet corn, so one of those dishes will be added to the menu in August and may only remain on the menu for about four weeks or something.

-Interview with R2, chef

The manager and chef at a casual dining establishment illustrated how the restaurant format itself can function as a sustainable strategy, where a tasting menu emphasizes the **Material** element of SPT in terms of portion sizes, ingredient planning, waste reduction, and menu adaptation, while highlighting the **Competencies** that chefs need to curate and design multiple dishes and the **Meanings** that reflect valuing seasonality and local produce. This format was described by the participant as follows:

We serve a tasting menu. We don't have a menu where you can choose things on an à la carte menu. [...] So, we have between 7 and 9 dishes, [...] and they are based on seasonal, local ingredients. So you get many small servings, and it should highlight, as best we can, what we can get our hands on at the time.

-Interview with R4, manager and chef

These examples collectively illustrate that seasonality is integral to menu decisions, necessitating continuous adaptation of dishes based on the availability of local ingredients. Consequently, seasonal menu development becomes an ongoing practice shaped by the interplay of available resources, culinary expertise, and the value attributed to local food.

4.3.3 Collaboration with local farmers

Within SPT, the successful execution of any sustainable routine depends heavily on its **Material** infrastructure, which includes physical supplier networks, delivery systems, and direct access to local producers. Interview findings demonstrate that sustainable sourcing is not just an abstract idea, but a practice deeply anchored in concrete, physical relationships with both small-scale and large-scale regional producers. Rather than relying on generic global logistics,

most of the restaurateurs build highly localized supply chains that turn the surrounding landscape into an extension of the kitchen. The respondent provided examples of these local sourcing relationships:

We have a local farmer who has dairy cows and beef cattle, and we mostly buy beef from them, [...] a local brewery that grows all its own hops. [...] apple must from Tosterup Castle. [...] wine from our neighbors, just five minutes down to the ocean here [...] and local gin partners, Bonalumi Bottlers, outside Brantevik. They make gin with local botanicals and spices [...].

-Interview with R7, co-owner, chef, and sommelier

These findings highlight the role of **Materials** in sustainable sourcing practices, as product quality, production conditions, and customer expectations strongly influence ingredient selection. Also, the above respondent described discontinuing collaboration with a local indoor fish farming company due to quality issues and customer dissatisfaction. This suggests that, although local sourcing may align with sustainability goals, material limitations such as quality and taste can restrict the feasibility of these practices. The respondent put forward that:

We had a collaboration with a local indoor fish farming company. But we had some problems with the quality. So, sadly, we had to choose not to buy fish from them because the guests were complaining that the fish had a muddy taste.

-Interview with R7, co-owner, chef and sommelier

Overall, collaboration with local producers provides opportunities for restaurants to strengthen local sourcing and build close connections with regional food networks. However, these relationships also depend on the ability of local suppliers to meet the practical needs of restaurants and their customers.

4.4 Waste management

Waste management emerged as an important dimension of sustainable restaurant practices, with participants describing different ways of reducing the amount of food and resources discarded during kitchen operations. Rather than being limited to waste disposal, waste management was integrated into everyday practices through the utilization of whole ingredients, preservation of seasonal products, reservation-based food production, and reuse of leftovers. These practices required restaurant practitioners to adapt their cooking methods, plan ingredient use in the menus, and find alternative ways of using available resources. From an SPT perspective, waste management involves the interaction of materials, competencies, and meanings, as available ingredients and resources are managed through experience, practical knowledge, and skills while reflecting values related to environmental responsibility and resource efficiency.

4.4.1 Whole ingredient utilization

Sustainable practices in sourcing, cooking, and serving food constitute a critical component of restaurant operations. The owner of a fine dining restaurant highlighted the role of **Competencies** in sustainable restaurant practices. The owner emphasized that minimizing waste is not a simple operational decision, but a skill-intensive process requiring creativity, patience, and the ability to maximize ingredient utilization. The need to ensure that dishes remain visually appealing and flavourful further demonstrates that sustainability must be integrated with culinary expertise and customer expectations. This statement suggests that sustainable food practices depend not only on the practical knowledge and adaptive skills of restaurant operations. The owner elaborated on this practice:

Another is to see how you work with the produce to maximize the outcome of the produce, so the largest amount is actually going to end up on a plate and in somebody's stomach. So you don't throw anything away, or as little as possible, and this takes a lot of creativity and patience. You also have to make it taste good and be appealing in both looks and flavors.

-Interview with R1, head chef and owner

Also, the manager of a casual dining establishment reflects sustainability as a holistic practice based on care and full utilization of ingredients. By stating that sustainability means *"to take care of all"*, the respondent reveals a value-based understanding of sustainability, reflecting the **Meanings** element of SPT. This indicates an ethical perspective where ingredients are respected, and waste is minimized through responsible use. The participant described this approach:

Sustainability means to take care of all. [...] I work with everything on the animal. So, if I have a fish, I work with the bones, [...] skin, [...] fish eggs from the inside, and maybe dry them, cure them [...] and smoke them. [...].

-Interview with R6, manager and chef

The practices that show sustainability are supported by the ability to identify alternative uses of ingredients that might otherwise be discarded, highlighting the role of specialized knowledge and adaptive problem-solving in everyday kitchen operations. This can be elaborated using the **Competencies** under SPT framework. Interview findings reveal that operational sustainability in the kitchen relies heavily on chefs' ability to spot alternative uses for ingredients that would normally end up in the bin. Participant R6 describes how this specialized knowledge is applied in practice, transforming what would be food waste into an intense base for future recipes:

If you dry something hard, and then you put water on it, then it's gonna dissolve, and there are a lot of flavors in it. [...] And then we use it to make a powder, or soup, or tea or whatever.

-Interview with R6, manager and chef

Consequently, another restaurant chef repurposed prawn shells by dehydrating them and processing them into a powder or infused oil for later use. In contrast,

another restaurant owner (R6) transformed celery leftovers into tea after a series of processing steps, aiming for zero waste. These practices demonstrate how waste reduction is embedded in everyday kitchen operations through the interaction of **Material** use, technical **Competencies**, and sustainability-oriented **Meanings**. She provided this fact with the following example:

We have three snacks at the start of the menu. For one of the snacks in the kitchen, we keep the shells of raw prawns. We save the shells and dehydrate them and blend them into a powder, and then we use the powder on top of something else, and sometimes we put it into an oil and save it for later.

-Interview with R2, chef

According to the owner of the casual fine dining restaurant (R4), the respondent recognized sustainability as having both environmental and economic value, suggesting that waste reduction is viewed as beneficial for the “*earth’s sake and for the business’s sake*”. This indicates that sustainable practices are integrated into business operations rather than treated as separate environmental actions.

These examples demonstrate that waste reduction is integrated into daily kitchen practices as a component of broader sustainability initiatives. Restaurant professionals apply their knowledge and creativity to maximize ingredient utilization, considering both environmental and economic value.

4.4.2 Preservation

These findings illustrate how sustainable sourcing practices are shaped by both materials and competencies within SPT. Seasonal ingredients are only available for limited periods, reflecting the **Material** constraints imposed by climatic conditions in the region, harvest cycles, and ingredient availability. In response, restaurant professionals apply preservation techniques such as oil infusion, pickling, salting, making jams, sauces, and syrups to extend ingredient usability until the next harvesting season. This demonstrates the role of **Competencies**, as sustainability depends on chefs’ technical knowledge, creativity, and planning to maximize the value of seasonal products. The respondent illustrated how seasonal ingredients are preserved:

This season is short, and we need to pick quite a lot of wild garlic, so that we can preserve it for future menus. So the leaves, we turn them into an oil most of the time. And we preserve sort of the capers and berries, and we put them in salt and vinegar, and we can use them all year round. [...] We also use the bird cherry, which is the first tree that blooms in spring. The flowers, when you pick them and put them in a sugar syrup, taste a bit like almonds [...], and now we are using them on the dessert.

-Interview with R2, chef

Taken as a whole, preservation enables the extension of the use of seasonal ingredients beyond their natural availability, making seasonality an ongoing part of restaurant practices throughout the year.

4.4.3 Reservation-based production

Reservation systems and pre-bookings function as **Material** arrangements that reduce uncertainty in customer demand, allowing restaurants to plan ingredient use, storage, and waste management more efficiently. By preparing food according to the confirmed bookings, restaurants minimize overproduction and reduce food waste. At the same time, this practice requires **Competencies** in forecasting, inventory management, and operational planning, enabling restaurant professionals to align food preparation with expected demand. The respondent explained that:

We literally make food for the bookings. [...] We don't have any walk-ins or anyone unexpected. Sometimes they call and if we have some fish or meat left [...]. We can fix that for you.

-Interview with R3, chef

This practice illustrates how restaurant operations can be structured around a more predictable pattern of demand, shaping both daily routines and decision-making in the kitchen.

4.4.4 Reuse

Reuse is an important method of avoiding food waste creatively. The owner of the lunch canteen highlighted resource-efficient cooking practices while minimizing food waste generated in the kitchen. This operation demonstrates leftovers as a **Material** element, **Competencies** such as knowledge, skill, and creativity, and gives rise to **Meanings** related to environmental sustainability. The participant provided an example of how leftovers are reused:

If we have vegetable leftovers, we can pickle them and preserve them for another day. If we have leftover herbs or salad, we can blend them into a dressing or vinaigrette or something like that

-Interview with R5, owner and chef

This approach extends the value of ingredients through multiple stages of preparation, establishing reuse as a practical component of daily kitchen operations.

4.5 Communicating sustainability to diners

Communicating sustainability to diners emerged as an important part of how restaurants present and give meaning to their sustainable practices. Participants described different ways of communicating information and experiences related to food, including storytelling, providing information about ingredients and producers on menus, and sharing personal experiences through staff interaction.

These practices enable restaurants to make aspects of sourcing, production, and preparation more visible to diners while providing opportunities to educate customers and encourage greater understanding and engagement with sustainable gastronomy.

4.5.1 Storytelling

A sustainable food practice is not fully complete when the plate leaves the kitchen; its ultimate value depends on how its story is shared and understood by the diner. Interview data reveal that every single analyzed restaurant relies heavily on storytelling to anchor the meaning of their culinary choices. This widespread practice shows that the cultural and environmental worth of a dish is not self-evident. Instead, it must be actively explained to the guest, transforming a simple meal into an educational, shared experience. Participant R6 highlights how central this narrative work is to the restaurant's daily workflow, showing that hospitality professionals are as much storytellers as they are culinary technicians.

Explaining the dish is like 50% of our work...you can tell a little story, like an anecdote.

-Interview with R6, manager and chef

This insight proves that sustainability gains its true power through clear communication. By sharing brief anecdotes about where an ingredient came from, how it was grown, or why a specific part of a plant was upcycled, restaurant staff perform vital education work for guests. This intentional choice helps to gently realign conventional dining expectations without overwhelming the guest.

4.5.2 Transparency in the menu

Communicating sustainability to diners emerged as an important practice through which restaurants reproduced and reinforced sustainable food values. By sharing the origins of ingredients, production methods, and supplier identities, participants aimed to create meanings of transparency, authenticity, and emotional connection, thereby increasing customer satisfaction with sustainable food practices. She put forward that:

When you come and sit down here, you don't get a menu, [...] you get a list with the names of the producers. [...] People can take the list home with them. [...] We try to highlight them and give them the credit for what they are doing. [...] We give a little bit of background, a little bit of ethnobotany information. [...] So today, these chefs are making their best food with the following ingredients, and then we list all the ingredients. So you can get celery from this guy, [...] and the cheese is from this farm. [...].

-Interview with R4, owner and chef

Regulatory requirements also shaped sustainability communication practices within restaurants. Participants described how menus were used to communicate

meat origin information in accordance with recent Swedish food regulations (Livsmedelsverket, 2025). For example, one participant (R7) explained that beef dishes are accompanied by supplier information on the menu, while guests increasingly ask about meat origins. This suggests that transparency is not solely driven by restaurant values, but is also institutionally reinforced through regulations, making sourcing information a normalized part of dining practices. The co-owner illustrated how this regulatory requirement is applied in practice:

When we have a beef dish, we write in the menu that the beef is from this local supplier. [...] A lot of our guests ask about the origin of our meat, because it is required by law in Sweden to tell guests where your meat comes from.

-Interview with R7, co-owner, chef, and sommelier

However, the manager (R6) of a casual dining restaurant stressed the fact that locality requires proof, arguing that *“if this is local, they have to prove it”*. Therefore, it is clear that transparency on the menu is not only about sharing information, but also about building trust among guests.

4.5.3 Staff interaction

In addition, storytelling is strengthened through staff participation in restaurant activities, particularly in team-driven restaurants. For example, involvement in activities such as foraging enables staff to develop personal connections and communicate these experiences directly to guests, thereby adding authenticity, emotional value, and a stronger sense of connection to the dining experience. One respondent stated that:

It adds a different layer when the staff is out picking, because it creates a bond between the staff, and we bring coffee, eat cakes, and have a good day out in the forest. So that also creates a team activity, which brings the people more together. And then, presenting it here to guests, we can say that we picked it ourselves, and it adds another value for the guests.

-Interview with R2, chef

This collaborative approach changes the Meaning of hospitality for both the staff and the diners. When the teams spend a day picking wild ingredients together, they build an authentic, personal connection to food. When they serve those ingredients at the table, they are sharing a genuine piece of their own collective story. This allows the staff to fulfil customer expectations without making dining feel like a chore, adding an irreplaceable layer of honesty and joy to the plate.

4.6 Structural barriers to sustainability

Under this theme, barriers to sustainability are discussed, showing why individual effort is not sufficient. In practice theory terms, the barriers emerge because sustainable practices require more demanding combinations of materials,

competencies, and meanings compared to conventional restaurant practices. **Figure 2** illustrates the internal forces, which are operational or micro barriers, that happen inside the kitchen, and external forces, which are systemic or macro that take place in the wider system.

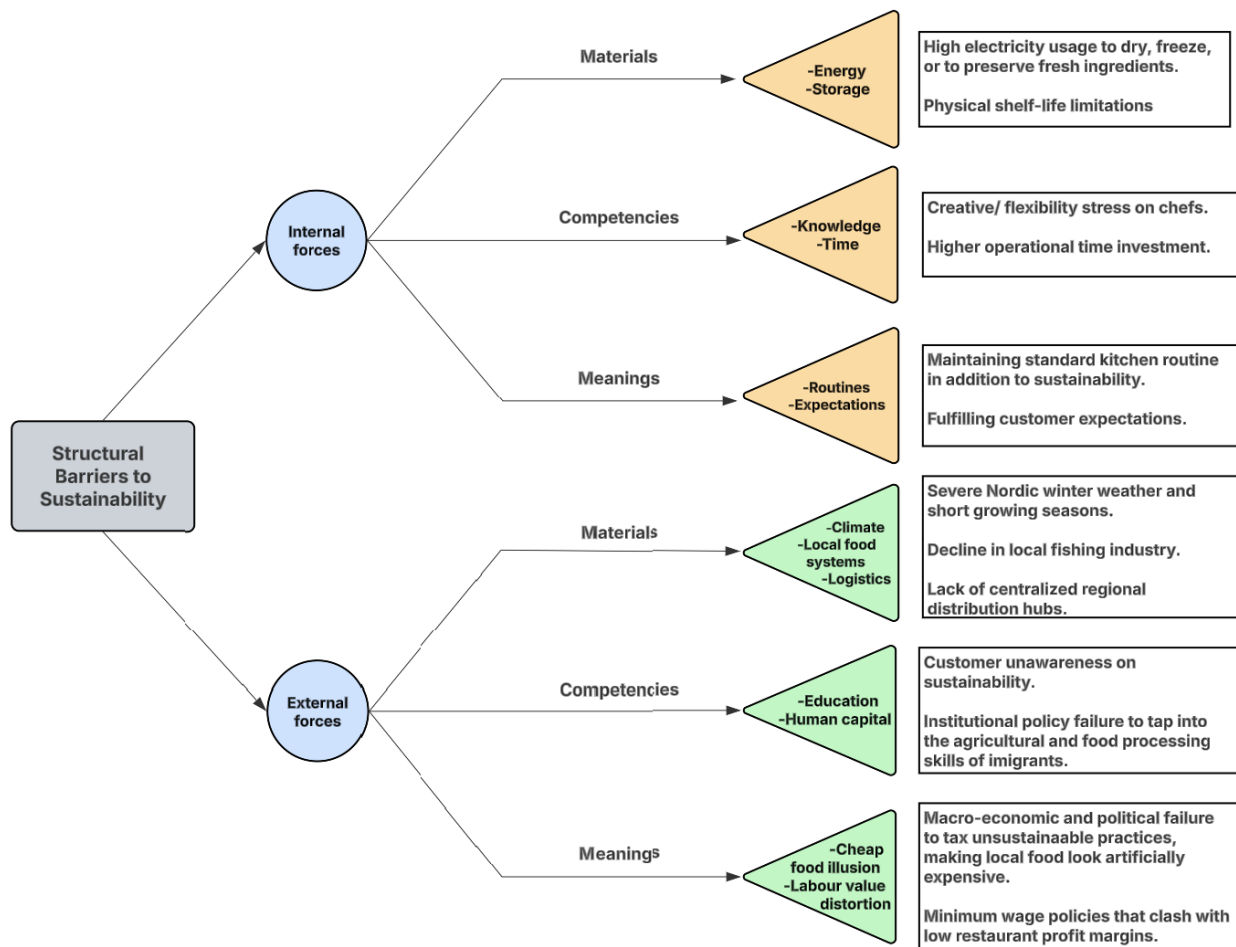


Figure 2. External and internal barriers to sustainability

Participants identified several barriers to implementing sustainable practices, emphasizing that sustainability often requires greater time investment, labor, and knowledge than conventional restaurant operations. For example, one participant (R2) explained that sustainability involves educational work directed not only for staff, but also for guests. The respondent suggested that:

It's probably time and knowledge, because a big part of it is educational work, but it's also educating guests...why are we serving things the way we are? Also, what is the reason for it? And also, it's about educating and motivating staff to work in this fashion.

-Interview with R2, chef

Another participant highlighted the additional effort involved in resource-efficient cooking. These findings suggest that sustainable practices are competence-

intensive and often conflict with existing economic and operational structures that favor convenience and efficiency. The interviewee argued that:

It's more work and effort. [...] It takes more time to be sustainable. It's just cheaper to throw away the fish bones and just buy pre-made stock. [...] you also have to be more creative and have the knowledge to be flexible with the ingredients.

-Interview with R7, co-owner, chef and sommelier

Participants also identified geographical and climatic limitations as barriers to sustainable sourcing. One participant noted that relying exclusively on local ingredients is particularly challenging in Sweden due to Nordic weather conditions, short growing seasons, and limitations in agricultural production compared with some other countries in Europe. These material constraints make it difficult to source all required ingredients locally while maintaining consistent quality standards. Therefore, the findings suggest that sustainable sourcing does not solely depend on restaurant commitment, but is also shaped by regional environmental conditions and agricultural potential. As highlighted by the chef of the restaurant within a cultural establishment:

Focusing only on local ingredients doesn't give you everything you need, especially in a Nordic country. In a country like Spain, it may be easier [...], but I would say that in Sweden, it has a bigger effect because of the weather [...] it is not very easy to farm and get what you need [...] It's a bit harder to keep the same quality all the time.

-Interview with R3, chef

One of the major barriers to the sustainable restaurant industry is the decline of local food systems. These findings demonstrate that local sourcing is constrained not only by restaurant choices but also by broader ecological and regional changes affecting food availability. As a result, sustainability practices often require balancing local ideals with practical sourcing realities. One respondent pointed out that:

The fishing industry in Skåne is almost non-existent. So, we get fish from Gothenburg [...] and sometimes there's a fish company in Denmark called Fiskeri Cayenne.

-Interview with R4, owner and chef

Similarly, the owner observed that:

We buy a lot from Copenhagen. We used to buy a lot from here and fish from Öresund. It's gone down drastically the last couple of years.

-Interview with R5, owner and chef

Participants identified substantial logistical and economic barriers to sustainable sourcing. The restaurant owner (R4) described challenges associated with purchasing ingredients from small-scale local suppliers, including limited delivery capacity, difficulties in maintaining freshness, and the need for preservation techniques, which consume considerable resources. Additionally, the restaurant owner (R6) argued that financial barriers exist, highlighting that locally sourced products are significantly more expensive than international alternatives and are

not sufficiently supported through policy mechanisms such as taxes on certain products. The participant pointed out that:

The biggest challenges are always: how do we get the ingredients? [...] because the smaller companies that have good ingredients need to avoid the middleman if they are going to make money. [...] It can be difficult to get the things delivered to Malmö. For example, the guy who is picking the wild things for us- how many times a week is it possible for him to deliver? [...] How many times a week is it possible for us to keep things fresh? [...] We need to think about how we are going to process them so that they keep a good quality; either we have to process them in a way, as we dry them, sell them, or freeze them. Then you have to think about how much electricity it uses and how much the quality deteriorates.

-Interview with R4, owner and chef

The findings also highlighted logistical infrastructure as an important material element influencing sustainable sourcing. The respondent (R7) revealed that local food is not inherently sustainable simply because it is geographically close. Small producers may be nearby, but if a restaurant has to collect products from multiple suppliers, local sourcing becomes inefficient. Therefore, the participant suggested shared transport systems, centralized distribution hubs, and better coordination among producers to make local products more sustainable. The respondent highlighted this logistical challenge:

It's also a logistical issue with transport, because you don't have time to go three hours every day picking up local products. So, [...] these smaller local producers need to cooperate more with the logistics sector, so it becomes easier, and you have less shipping and delivery costs also.

-Interview with R7, co-owner, chef, and sommelier

The restaurant chef argued that minimum wage policies and low profit margins make it difficult for restaurants to operate sustainably, as many workers earn below the minimum wage while customer expectations remain high. This finding is consistent with Wellton et al. (2017), who highlighted the low profit margins in this industry. The respondent also suggested that prices should increase to reflect the true cost of quality and sustainability, but questioned how this can be communicated and accepted by customers. The chef highlighted this concern:

[...] Swedish politics about having a minimum wage to be able to stay in Sweden... There's a lot of people in this business not earning above the minimum wage.

-Interview with R2, chef

The restaurant owner (R4) described sustainability challenges within broader food system and policy structures and argued that there should be clear government support to prioritize national agriculture and food self-sufficiency. The participant also highlighted the underutilized agricultural competencies of people with different backgrounds relevant to the field of agriculture, suggesting a transition towards a more sustainable food system. She stated that:

[...] It should be a very clear directive from the government that we need to support food production in our own country in any way that we can. You know, we have so many people, refugees, people moving here from other countries that have such a good

background in animal husbandry, in cheesemaking, and farming; they have centuries more experience than we have in Sweden.

-Interview with R4, owner and chef

Several participants emphasized that the support should primarily target farmers and food producers rather than restaurants themselves. They argued that restaurants are largely dependent on the affordability and availability of locally produced ingredients, which are shaped by farming costs, regulations, and taxation. This suggests that improved conditions for domestic producers would indirectly benefit restaurants and strengthen local food systems. R4 emphasized that support should primarily be directed towards farmers:

Restaurants don't need support, and we have our own business model, which is independently run. [...] Schools, hospitals, and subsidized restaurants need support from the government. But I would say, first and foremost, support should go to the farmers, because if the farmers can provide their products at a good price and gain a good chance.

-Interview with R4, owner and chef

Similarly, one respondent stressed the benefits this would bring to restaurants as follows:

Make it easier for Swedish farmers, because it's so expensive for them now with all the handling and the regulations, and everything. In that way, [...] it would benefit the restaurants.

-Interview with R5, owner and chef

The below participant also highlighted the importance of greater government support for farmers:

It's the government. There should be lower prices from the suppliers that have local produce. [...] The tax should be lower for farmers in Sweden.

-Interview with R6, manager and chef

Consequently, these findings suggest that individual restaurant commitment is completely bound to macro-level governance. For sustainable gastronomic routines to become the default standard rather than an expensive exception, policy mechanisms must actively lower farming costs and get rid of excessive rules. Rebuilding a resilient domestic food culture is not a burden that can be forced onto independent commercial kitchens; it requires a structural commitment to protecting the hands that grow the food- keeping culinary traditions alive while creating a stable foundation for tackling global environmental problems.

Another finding revealed that most of the restaurants focused more on local produce and less on organic produce, even though local products are not always better (Purcell and Brown, 2005). The interviewee argued that higher prices in ecological farming make them less feasible within restaurant operations. As a result, restaurants appeared to prioritize locally sourced ingredients over ecological alternatives, reflecting a pragmatic approach to sustainability in which

locality was perceived as more economically viable and operationally manageable. The respondent pointed out the cost difference:

If you compare conventional farming and ecological farming [...] there is a big price difference, and that's an issue.

-Interview with R7, co-owner, chef, and sommelier

This insight highlights the intersection of **Material** costs and operational **Meanings**. Restaurant owners do not reject organic food purposely, but they are forced to make conscious compromise based on what keeps their business alive. By choosing conventional but local items over imported organic ones, practitioners redefine what “sustainable” means for their specific workspace-focusing on cutting transport emissions and supporting nearby communities.

A chef in a fine dining restaurant in Malmö emphasized that restaurant pricing reflects much more than food itself, encompassing a wide range of materials, aesthetics, and services. Customers expect not only high-quality food and service but also a pleasant atmosphere, polished glassware, attractive table settings, and clean facilities. Therefore, restaurant value is enhanced through an integrated material and service environment. The chef highlighted the broader value expected by customers:

[...] if you come here, you want really good service, good food, a good setting, nicely polished glasses, a bathroom that smells nice, and flowers on the table.

-Interview with R2, chef

Customer awareness and interest emerged as a barrier to implementing sustainable practices and achieving sustainable goals in restaurants. R8, the owner and chef, highlighted that customers do not always understand the sustainable practices adopted by the restaurant or the reasons behind them. This lack of understanding and engagement can make it challenging for restaurants to communicate and encourage greater acceptance of sustainability-oriented practices. As one respondent explained:

It's mostly the customer, because [...] they don't really understand what we are doing, and they don't understand why we are doing these.

-Interview with R8, owner and chef

The barriers identified across the interviews collectively illustrate that sustainable restaurant practices are shaped by a complex interplay of factors extending beyond the individual restaurant's control. Key obstacles include limited time and labor resources, insufficient knowledge and education among staff, challenges in securing consistent local supply, and logistical difficulties related to transporting and storing local products. Economic viability remains a persistent concern, as the higher costs often associated with sustainable sourcing or practices can conflict with profit margins, especially for smaller establishments. In addition, inadequate policy support, regulatory gaps, and the absence of effective incentives were noted as institutional barriers, while inconsistent customer awareness and

understanding of sustainability further complicate the adoption of these practices. As such, sustainability in restaurants is contingent not only upon the willingness and competencies of professionals, but is fundamentally determined by broader material constraints, economic pressures, policy environments, and social dynamics that govern what is practically feasible within the sector.

5. Discussion

The study was designed to address the research objective of understanding how everyday practices and beliefs held by restaurant professionals contribute to the development of sustainable gastronomic tourism in Scania, utilizing Social Practice Theory (SPT) as the guiding framework. In alignment with the FAO's definition of sustainable gastronomy, which emphasizes the entire journey of food from origin to consumption (FAO, 2025), the research connects these processes to broader gastronomic tourism perspectives. Daily restaurant operations, like those in other sectors, are routinized aspects of hospitality business practice. By applying SPT, this study specifically investigates the interrelationship between materials, competencies, and meanings as outlined by Bourdieu (2020). The interplay of these elements as shown in **Figure 3**, is central to achieving the study's objectives, as materials (the physical elements of practice) and competencies (the skills and knowledge of restaurant professionals) combine to generate a meaning that shapes gastronomic development (Shove et al., 2012). Through this framework, the research clarifies how sustainable practices in restaurants can create value within the local context and thereby advance sustainable tourism, directly addressing the study's stated objectives.

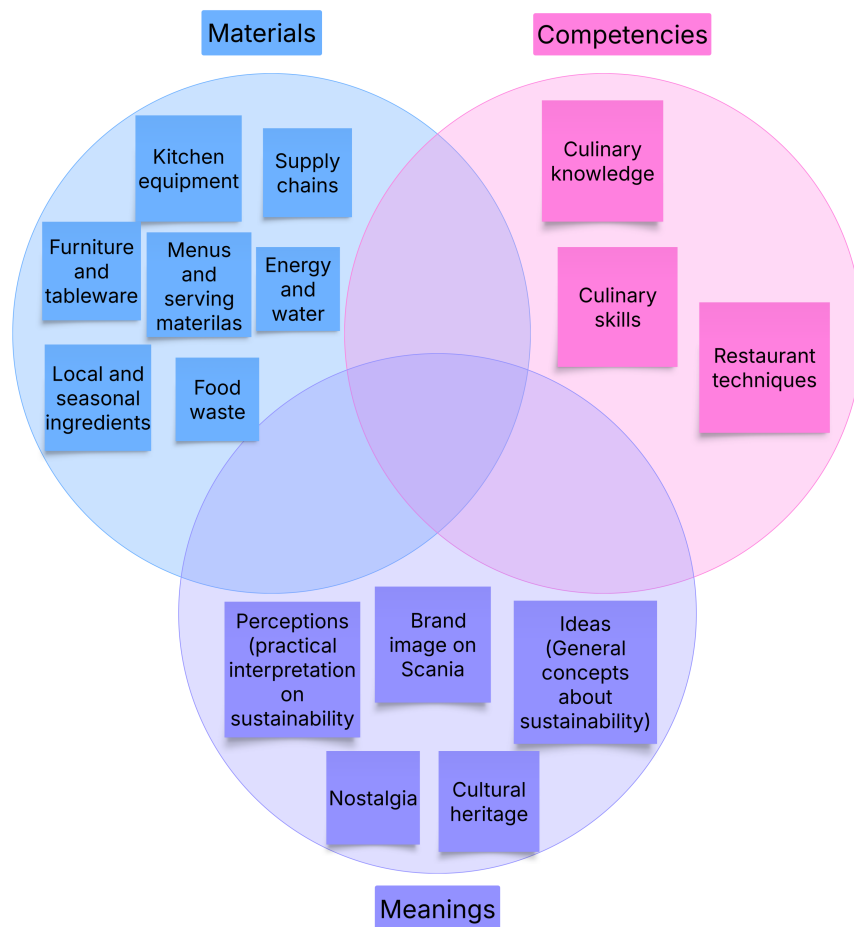


Figure 3. Social practice theory with respect to the case study

The major themes emerged from the findings were interpreted with the three elements of the SPT. The findings showed that **materials** formed the practical foundation of sustainable restaurant practices. The most prominent material elements identified across the interviews included locally and seasonally sourced ingredients in the region, and the interviews emphasized this trend as their best sustainability approach within restaurant operations. This observation is consistent with the literature of Sormaz et al. (2016) on the role of local food in tourist attraction. This preference appears to be closely linked to prevailing perceptions of local and seasonal produce, which are seen as cleaner and more authentic. The emphasis on local produce is understood as a broader sustainability narrative that shapes restaurant practices and customer expectations. The gastronomic movement of 'New Nordic Cuisine' has significantly influenced the growing interest in local and regional food as an ethical sourcing practice (New Nordic Food Manifesto, n.d.).

On the other hand, the chefs and owners believed that local ingredients in the menus serve as their ultimate marketing strategy to uplift regional gastronomic tourism (Nygård and Wramner, 2013). However, these assumptions do not always guarantee that local ingredients are the best in terms of chemical use and environmental sustainability according to the theory of the local trap (Purcell and Brown, 2005). The respondents did not intentionally discuss the focus on organically certified products due to reasons such as higher prices and the belief that local is always good. One of the respondents (R7) argued that it's better to have local produce from a neighbor rather than organic produce from a long distance, which aligns with the study by Pandey et al. (2023) regarding trust and accountability between neighbors. On the other hand, sourcing locally involves considering freshness, flavor, higher nutritional value, reduced miles, a strong local supplier network, transparency, and food safety (Chiffolleau and Dourian, 2020; Greenstate, 2025). Anyhow, the use of local ingredients in menus creates a sense of regional pride, especially for tourists who select a given destination based on others' food experiences.

In addition, preservation methods identified in the findings, including salting, pickling, smoking, drying, fermenting and sugaring, also represent material elements of SPT, as they rely on ingredients, preservation equipment and storage facilities. All the restaurants, except one whose co-owner was R7, emphasized having a library of preservatives in the kitchen throughout the year. The respondent (R7) was more interested in having produce in season and fresh ingredients in cooking. Beyond ingredients and preservation equipment, the findings also identified menus, digital platforms, scannable QR codes, and the restaurant environment as important material elements that support sustainable restaurant operations. These tangible artifacts enable restaurants to make sourcing practices, food origins, and sustainability initiatives visible to customers,

providing the physical infrastructure through which sustainability can be communicated as experienced.

The study further identified **competencies** as a critical enabling element of sustainable gastronomy. Restaurant professionals relied on specialized culinary knowledge, technical preservation skills, menu planning, creativity, inventory management, storytelling, and communication skills to transform available materials into sustainable dining experiences. These competencies allow restaurant owners and chefs to minimize waste, adapt menus to seasonal availability, preserve ingredients throughout the year, and communicate the value of sustainability to diners. In this study, waste management was identified as one of the prominent operational practices, but also a competence-intensive process. As one participant (R1) explained, the objective is to “maximize the outcome of the produce, so the largest amount is actually going to end up on a plate”. This illustrates that waste management relies on chefs’ technical knowledge, creativity, and adaptive skills to maximize ingredient utilization while maintaining the quality and appeal of the dishes.

In addition, the findings revealed skills in salting fish and meat, pickling herring and beetroot, smoking fish and meat, drying berries, mushrooms, and herbs, fermenting fish, dairy products, and vegetables, and sugaring berries. These practices emphasized the integration of materiality (ingredients, jars, kitchen equipment) with competencies (knowledge and skills in these techniques) within SPT, which aligns well with the guidelines of the Swedish Food Agency regarding food waste management through knowledge (Livsmedelsverket, 2025).

Apart from the waste management strategies, the findings revealed that all the restaurants play a critical role in conveying sustainability behind sourcing, cooking, and serving food through storytelling. The restaurant owner (R6) emphasized that “explaining the dish is 50% of our work”, which means communication is an important step in daily operations for more transparent sustainable gastronomy. While Swedish law makes it mandatory to show where meat comes from (Livsmedelsverket, 2025), four of these restaurants went a step further by listing the origin of all ingredients, which gives more transparency in their supply network. According to the participants, storytelling and menus were the best approaches in sustainability communication; hence, it emotionally connects tourists to the destination by revealing the heritage behind traditional cooking and the authenticity of local food. This is also evident from the study by Vohs et al. (2019), which shows that the story behind the food gives meaning to a sustainable gastronomic experience.

From the social practice perspective, sustainability communication includes tangible artifacts such as the menu itself, digital platforms, scannable QR codes, and the restaurant environment. A restaurant can design the most transparent

menu in the world, but if diners do not have the literacy or interest to read it, or if the chef does not have the knowledge to explain it, communication breaks down. Therefore, competencies add value to the material elements by enabling restaurant professionals to communicate sustainability in meaningful and accessible ways. Competence within sustainable communication represents the cognitive and interpretive capacity required by actors to encode and decode environmental information (Shove et al., 2012). The findings therefore suggest that sustainability does not solely depend on the material element, but equally on the knowledge and practical capabilities required to utilize these materials effectively.

Finally, the interviews revealed that these materials and competencies generated broader **meanings** that extended beyond environmental sustainability. The findings revealed that meanings associated with sustainable restaurant practices extend beyond environmental considerations to encompass cultural identity, nostalgia, and authenticity. Traditional dishes were perceived as carriers of collective memory, evoking childhood experiences and a sense of belonging among local diners. This interpretation is reflected in the observation of a restaurant co-owner (R7) that traditional dishes “bring back a lot of joy and memories” for local residents, while providing an opportunity to share the history and origin of the dishes with tourists. Instead of just being an item on the menu, the food becomes a symbol of ancestral heritage, seasonal survival, a creative mechanism against food waste, and environmental responsibility through reduced imports during the off-season. For tourists, it provides a sense of cultural authenticity combined with responsible eating (Weijers et al., 2025). Therefore, restaurants are not just food service providers, but also intermediaries connecting visitors with local food, regional identity, and tourist experiences (Jönsson, 2019).

Taken together, the findings demonstrated that sustainable gastronomic tourism emerges through the dynamic interaction of materials, competencies and meanings rather than through any single practice alone. This supports the central assumption of SPT that practices are reproduced through the integration of interconnected elements and provides a useful framework for understanding how everyday restaurant activities contribute to sustainable tourism development.

Even though SPT theory builds a strong connection within the internal environment of a restaurant, external forces still create tensions between sustainability implementation and the tourism potential. Higher prices and taxes on ingredients were seen as common barriers in restaurants, and several studies support this finding. Roy, Hall and Ballantine (2016) identified a significant gap between chefs’ interest in purchasing local products and the practical constraints hindering their adoption in the hospitality sector, such as inconsistent supply and higher costs. Also, Kasim and Ismail (2012) found that even though restaurant owners are environmentally conscious, external pressures and cost barriers are problematic for sustainable implementation. Therefore, sourcing decisions can

affect sustainable choices, even when chefs or owners have good education and appropriate skills. The government should support and provide subsidies to food producers and farmers, as they are the main suppliers of restaurants.

Another constraint is limited infrastructure, for example, a lack of organized logistics systems and poor connections between owners and suppliers/intermediaries. This creates practical constraints for restaurant owners in sourcing local produce, managing storage, managing time, and handling additional efforts during restaurant operations. Furthermore, every participant emphasized the ecological decline of regional food systems, especially the rapid decline of the fishing industry. Therefore, restaurants have to rely on fish imports from outside Scania, which creates a barrier to sustainable implementation (for historical context on Scania's original fishery growth, see Bunte, 1966). Since seafood consumption is of high interest among tourists worldwide, the regional fishing industry needs to be developed further. These findings are supported by Wellton and Lainpelto (2021), who highlighted that sustainability practices are continuously negotiated within operational barriers.

The study was intentionally limited to the region of Scania, known for its strong agricultural capacity and extensive availability of local suppliers, which facilitates local sourcing for restaurants more readily than in other parts of Sweden. Methodologically, the use of qualitative data from eight semi-structured interviews provided valuable contextual depth and nuanced insights. However, it is important to explicitly acknowledge that the small sample size represents a methodological limitation and precludes generalization of the findings to the broader hospitality sector in Sweden. Furthermore, the study's selection criteria focused on restaurants offering traditional Swedish, modern Nordic, or contemporary European cuisine, despite Scania- particularly Malmö- being characterized by considerable cultural and culinary diversity. As a result, the perspectives of multicultural restaurant operators were not captured, reflecting an additional scope limitation inherent in the methodological approach and the choice to prioritize authenticity within a specific regional food context.

5.1 Practical and policy implications

The findings provide several practical implications for restaurant practitioners, tourism stakeholders and policymakers seeking to strengthen sustainable gastronomic tourism. The study demonstrates that sustainability in restaurant operations cannot be achieved solely through environmental policies or sustainability branding, but requires the integration of sustainable practices into everyday routines of hospitality work.

Sustainability should not be treated as a marketing tool in the restaurant industry; it must be part of daily kitchen routines. Restaurant staff play a critical role from sourcing to serving food. The competencies involved in sourcing, cooking, and serving food are developed through experiences over time and education related to the restaurant industry. Many owners revealed the importance of education in the restaurant industry, as it supports decision-making during kitchen operations and helps share knowledge among peers and guests. A study by Wellton et al. (2018) demonstrated that staff without a background in relevant education create problems in the organizational structure.

Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) in Scania serve as crucial facilitators, building networks between local producers and the hospitality sector while promoting a sustainable, authentic food identity (Syssner and Hjerpe, 2018). Visit Sweden, Visit Skåne, and Tourism in Skåne are examples of DMOs that brand Scania as an attractive destination for locals and international visitors. DMOs can further strengthen gastronomic tourism by facilitating collaboration between restaurants and local producers, promoting regional food identities, supporting sustainability initiatives, and integrating gastronomy into broader destination branding strategies. Furthermore, smart tourism approaches should be developed to bridge operational gaps between local suppliers and restaurants, as mentioned in the study of Gelter, Fuchs and Lexhagen (2022).

Ultimately, this study demonstrates the significant value of employing a practice-based perspective in hospitality and tourism research. By focusing on everyday routines rather than abstract theories, this framework enables a deeper understanding of operational habits, sustainability challenges, ingredient sourcing decisions, guest dynamics and workplace culture, thereby offering a valuable approach for examining sustainable practices in the sector.

6. Conclusion

For sustainable gastronomic tourism, it is the routine practices embedded within most critical restaurant operators. These practices are maintained through the interaction of materials, competencies and meanings, with the knowledge and skills of restaurant operators playing an important supporting role in their enactment.

Social Practice Theory (SPT) can be considered a valuable theoretical framework for understanding and analyzing sustainable practices within restaurant environments. This study explored socially embedded practices, routines, and beliefs through theoretical and practical lenses. By examining restaurants with different concepts, this theory demonstrated that sustainability is not performed through individual actions. Instead, it is an interconnected network of tangible materials, professional competencies, and shared cultural meanings. Restaurant professionals serve as crucial change-makers within local food networks, transforming fresh seasonal ingredients into authentic cultural values through specialized culinary skills and traditional preservation techniques. Efficient kitchen waste management serves as a core operational activity, connecting environmental sustainability with economic viability. Through the lens of SPT, this study demonstrates that minimizing food waste through whole-ingredient utilization, preservation techniques, reuse, and reservation-based production is not merely an operational choice, but a deeply embedded social practice stabilized by the interaction of kitchen materials, expert culinary competencies, and shared environmental meanings. Communicating sustainability to diners is directly linked with gastronomic tourism, and ultimately, it gives a sense of pride in the region, cultural heritage, traditions, and nostalgia.

However, the transition towards a truly sustainable gastronomic tourism sector is challenged by external structural, financial, and logistical barriers. Restaurants must navigate practical constraints, including seasonal and climatic barriers, high operational costs, unorganized infrastructure, and declining regional food systems. These operational realities often force a compromise between sustainability ideals and business viability. This study contributes to the field by demonstrating, through empirical analysis and the application of Social Practice Theory, how restaurant professionals in Scania are already integrating sustainability into their daily practices despite these constraints. It reveals specific areas where targeted policy interventions and support can be most effective, such as strengthening structural support mechanisms from policymakers, fostering unified logistical cooperation among regional suppliers, and enhancing institutional backing for local farming and food production. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of investing in knowledge and skills development through formal education, training, and professional networks that connect chefs, restaurateurs,

producers, and other stakeholders. Such initiatives, as identified in this study, can strengthen collaboration across the supply chain, enhance restaurants' capacity to adopt sustainable practices, and facilitate progress towards a more sustainable gastronomic tourism sector. Finally, by illuminating the significance of increasing consumer awareness, this research underscores the potential of educational initiatives, public campaigns, and transparent communication to shift consumer behavior in favor of sustainable dining. As demonstrated in the findings, when consumers better understand the environmental, cultural, and economic value of their food choices, they are more likely to support restaurants committed to sustainable gastronomic practices, thus strengthening overall demand for sustainable gastronomic tourism. In this way, the study offers both theoretical and practical contributions for advancing sustainability within the sector.

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-Savindi Perera

AI Use Statement

Google AI overview was used for the following purposes.

- To find synonyms for some words to avoid repetition.
- Preliminary information searches.
- To get a summary of some articles to find the relevance to the study.

Grammarly was used for.

- Language support, grammar correction, and enhancing clarity.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions

Introductory section

1. Can you briefly introduce your restaurant and its concept?
2. Who is your main target group (locals, tourists, or both)?

Sustainability and practices

1. What does sustainability mean to you personally in your restaurant work?
2. Can you describe specific sustainable practices you follow in sourcing, cooking or serving food, seasonal menus, use of organic ingredients, waste reduction strategies, etc...
3. How do seasonal or local ingredients influence your daily menu decisions?
4. How do cost, availability of ingredients and customer expectations affect your sustainable choices?
5. Do you have any collaboration with local farmers, fishers or producers?
6. What challenges do you face when trying to be more sustainable?

Menu & Local Food Identity

1. How does your menu reflect the local food culture or region?
2. Do you intentionally highlight local ingredients or traditions? Why?
3. How do customers respond to dishes connected to regional identity?

Communicating sustainability to diners

1. How do you convey sustainability to your guests (menus, storytelling, staff interaction, social media, etc.)
2. Do customers actively ask about sustainability or local sourcing?
3. How important is storytelling, landscape, and entertainment in shaping the dining experience?
4. Do you think sustainability communication influences customer satisfaction and the fine dining experience?

Gastronomic tourism perspective

1. Do you notice tourists specifically looking for local or sustainable food experiences?
2. How do you think your restaurant contributes to the image of the region as a food destination?
3. Do you see gastronomy as an important part of tourism in this area? If so, why?

Restaurant journey, innovation and future

1. How has your sustainability approach evolved over time?
2. What improvements or innovations would you like to implement in the future?
3. What support would restaurants need to become more sustainable?

Reflection/ closing

1. In your opinion, what role should restaurants play in promoting sustainable food culture?
2. Is there anything else about sustainability, gastronomy, or tourism you think is important?

Appendix 2

Interview Consent Form

Preliminary project title: Sustainable narratives in restaurants of Scania, Sweden: Food service strategies, chefs' sustainability practices and their contribution to gastronomic tourism.

University: Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Alnarp

Master program: Food and landscape

Module: Independent project in Food Studies

Master's Student: Kahagallalage Savindi Tharushi Perera

Participant's name: _____

Project description

This research project investigates how restaurants in Skåne integrate sustainability into their food practices, menus, and customer experiences, and how these practices contribute to gastronomic tourism and regional food identity. The study also focuses on restaurant professionals' perspectives on local sourcing, seasonal ingredients, cultural heritage, and storytelling in dining experiences.

The purpose is to better understand how sustainability is communicated to guests and how restaurants help shape the region's culinary image for both locals and visitors. Participation involves a voluntary interview in which participants share professional insights, experiences, and opinions. All information collected will be used solely for this master's thesis, handled confidentially, and participants may withdraw at any time without consequence

I, the undersigned, confirm that (Please tick the appropriate boxes)

	Yes	No
1. I have read and understand the project description given above		
2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.		
3. I agree to take part in the project which include being interviewed, recorded (audio), transcribed and taking photographs when necessary.		
4. I have been informed that I have the right to withdraw my consent at any time during the research process.		
5. I understand my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the project.		
6. That the information I share can be quoted and published using a pseudonym.		

	Yes	No
7. I have the right to see the transcribed parts of the interview and quotes used in the thesis.		
8. The interviewer should keep all the materials such as recordings, photos, transcribed notes in a safe place and do not reveal to a third party without consent from the participants.		
9. I agree that the interviewer will conduct an on-site observation of the restaurant.		

Participant

(Name of the participant, place and date)

(Signature)

Master's student:

Savindi Perera

(Name of the participant, place and date)

(Signature)